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Hinduism

A Study of the Hindu Religion, Its Development, Practices and Beliefs with a Discussion of the Caste System.

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SUDRA
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BRAHMIN

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THE VEDAS
BUDDHISM
MOSLEM CONQUEST
EUROPEAN INFLUENCE

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Hinduism

A Study of the Hindu Religion, Its Development, Practices and Beliefs with a Discussion of the Caste System

By

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and

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1.

Introduction

1. In the later Middle Ages, scholars sought to encompass the sum of knowledge in the possession of a few key words so pregnant with meaning that they would contain all other ideas. The attempt never succeeded, but those who tried it are not unworthy of praise for their ambitious attempt. To seek to give an adequate picture of Hinduism within the narrow compass of this study seems no less ambitious. Sir Alexander Baines in his work on the Ethnography of India says:

> Most general statements concerning India require abundant qualification to meet local exceptions. It must never be forgotten that India is not a country but a collection of countries, and though caste as an institution is universal and the basis of the system is the same throughout, the form assumed by the superstructure raised upon that foundation differs materially in different regions.

Elsewhere he says:

> It should be borne in mind from the outset that though this vast aggregate is spread over a continuous area between Cape Comorin and the Himalaya, and is politically under one rule, the population does not contain, as a whole, any of the essential elements of nationality. . . . The language, falling under no less than 147 heads, varies from province to province. . . . Society again is split up into almost innumerable, self-contained division, under sacerdotal prohibition from intermarriage and domestic intercourse with each other. Religion, moreover, con-

stitutes a well defined distinction only in the case of creeds introduced from abroad. The Faith, returned (called by) under a single title, itself of foreign origin, by nearly three-fourths of the population, covers a vast and incoherent collection of beliefs and forms of worship, from the tribal animalism of the primitive denizens of the forest to those involving the most refined metaphysical conceptions.

2. Yet, covering all this diversity there is an outward appearance of homogeneity that would belie this diversity. This is true not only in the manner of dress, habitation and food, but also in the underlying attitude of the generality of the population towards the fortunes and misfortunes of life. And more striking still is the fact that for at least 2,500 years this diversity and homogeneity have existed side by side, or rather have mutually sustained each other, notwithstanding the elsewhere levelling military and cultural invasion of Alexander the Great, the incursions of the Scythians, the tidal wave of Islamism which in other places even swept Christianity before it, the inroads of the Mongols and the annexation by England. What is even more to be wondered at is that this set form of life was not originated nor developed or indigenous. These were driven out so as to leave hardly a trace. Invading Aryans, brought the seeds, or rather the catalyzing agent, of Hinduism with them from the outside. Nevertheless, there is no historical evidence that this way of life was imposed by force on the population that had previously driven out the first inhabitants. No single decade or century in Indian history can be marked as the time when Hinduism became the way of life of the people. There is a single quickening spirit for India and that spirit is Hinduism.

3. The Church rightly has marked out India as a single, distinct entity for evangelization, notwithstanding its seeming diversity. Hinduism, which is so plastic and assimilative, while at the same time so uncompromising in preserving its identity, presents itself everywhere in India as the chief problem of the Church. Because this is so, it is only fitting that priests should know, at least in broad outlines, something of this complex and baffling system. A knowledge of the early origins and subse-

quent history of Hinduism will, it is hoped, shed a light of understanding upon the vast labor before the Church's missioners. Those aspects of the system will be pointed out which could serve as a common basis of discussion and sympathy between the missioner and Hindus.

4. The plan of this study will be, therefore, to present all those elements which will throw some light on the temper and attitudes of Hinduism. It would be impossible to treat of any section in detail. (There are, for instance, several thousand volumes on the caste system alone.) A definition of Hinduism will be given, after which those aspects of the nature of the land, the people and their history will be treated which will explain to a great extent the place of doctrine in Hinduism and the significance and importance of the caste system. Then will be presented the sources of Hindu doctrine and their place in the system. The fundamental problems arising from Hinduism and facing the missioner will be presented. With regard to the last point, it should be noted that local conditions will materially affect the work of the individual missioner. Consequently, only those aspects are treated which may be considered as being essential to the system. No attempt is herein made to give a summary of the sacred books or an outline of the pantheon, for this would make the study disproportionately large while at the same time it is not deemed necessary.

2.

What is Hinduism?

5. It is difficult to define Hinduism. Some years ago, Father Hull, of the *Bombay Examiner,* asked twenty-five well-known Hindus what their religion was and received twenty-five different answers, essentially varying in many instances one from the other. This in itself may mean little, because even priests would be hard put to it to define in a few words what the Catholic religion is, except in a descriptive way. But no matter how elusive the concise definition of the Catholic religion, the fact is that it has been adequately defined; whereas whoever attempts to define Hinduism eventually admits the inadequacy of his definition.

6. Nevertheless, a definition of Hinduism must be attempted. A workable definition of a descriptive kind might be as follows: *Hinduism is that traditional Indian way of life for every stratum of Indian society in all its ramifications—religious, social, economic and personal—which in practice is tacitly accepted by the Brahmin class and is practised by the people because of the Brahmin approval.*

7. An analysis of this definition will serve as the schematic basis of the development of this study. Hinduism is a *traditional* Indian way of life. By that word "traditional" is meant that the Indians themselves, whether Hindu or Muslim, will admit that the present form of Hinduism has developed from the earliest known traditions of the Indians. In recent years, in the valley of the Indus River at Mohando-jaro there has been

discovered the site of an ancient Indian civilization, with an as yet undeciphered language, which dates back to the third millenium. Before the discovery of that city, the Vedas, the earliest sacred books of the Hindus, were believed to have been composed around the year 1500 B.C. Now, in the light of this new archeological find, doubts concerning the validity of this date have arisen in the minds of those who hold the Vedas to be the oldest literature of India. Some claim that the Vedas must have been composed before the building of this city; others still retain the date 1500 B.C. But in any case, this very discussion emphasizes the point that Hinduism is regarded as a development of the earliest Indian traditional way of life. Buddhism, Islamism and other forms of religion are not Hindu because they are not strictly traditional, having been grafted on the old tradition.

8. Hinduism, according to the definition, is said to be a way of life. This, in a sense, is even more strictly meant than to say that Christianity is a way of life; for the Christian way of life might in other words be called a life of personal prayer, whereas the Hindu way of life could more exactly be described as a life of ritual. For the Christian there are indifferent acts to which he might give a religious signficance, but for the Hindu every act has a religious meaning which he must recognize. Herein lies the very heart of Hinduism. There does not exist a personal, intimate relationship between the Hindu and his deity. The notion of loving whatever supernatural force he believes in is far from him. For the Hindu, the Absolute, in whatever way he may choose to worship it, has given him this life as a way to work out his expiation for the shortcomings of his previous incarnation. The Hindu has no reason to believe that in any one given incarnation he may reach complete absorption in the divinity and thus be freed from the vicissitudes of numerous future re-incarnations. He lives this life as best he can according to the circumstances in which he finds himself, for it is the only life he knows given him by the Absolute. It is not for him the only life. At the end, when the course of the re-incarnations has been finished, he will surely have the true life in God. This

explains the almost fatalistic attitude of the Hindu towards life and his acceptance of the caste system. It, moreover, serves as a logical basis for the Hindu's complete indifference to material discomforts and personal glory in this world. This attitude colors his personal life completely and governs his dealings with his neighbor in the religious, social and economic fields. It finds its expression within the caste system.

9. This way of life is tacitly accepted by the Brahmin class because the Brahmin does not exercise a positive ritualistic jurisdiction over the acts of the people. There is no central supreme office which can dictate or declare what is right and wrong for a Hindu. Nevertheless, it is an historical fact that from the earliest known times the priestly class, the Brahmins, have been the leading force in shaping the way of life for the Indian people. It would be impossible to explain Hinduism if there had not been Brahmins from the very beginning. This statement is not meant in the sense that the Brahmins are one class in a way of life governed by the caste system, but that Hinduism could exist if all the other castes had been merged into one, whereas without Brahminism there never would have been any castes in the form in which they exist today nor even Hinduism itself.

10. This must not lead to the conclusion that Brahminism is Hinduism. Brahminism is narrower in its connotation than Hinduism. It is the way of life of the higher Brahmins (who are comparatively few) and has been the sustaining force which has given meaning to all else in Indian life. Even of the Brahmins a small number follow all of its precepts and counsels.

11. Finally, Hinduism is a way of life that is practised by the Indian people because of the Brahmin approval. This statement does not signify that the Brahmins at one time or other dictated the Hindu way of life to the others. (Even today, each caste is ruled by social or political leaders. The Brahmin *may suggest* what a newly formed caste or sub-caste should practise. He may not dictate. If the Brahmin refuses to eat with any particular caste, that caste is regarded as unclean). Yet from the earliest times, the priesthood among the Hindus re-

mained until recently the sole active intellectual and truly social force. The ascendancy they exercised caused others to look upon them as the perfect exemplars of right living. Others, according to their circumstances of life, learning and strength or weakness, accepted the Brahmin leadership without, however, giving up entirely their ancient superstitions and beliefs. For example, Brahminism in its purest form makes no allowance for polytheism. Yet the Brahmins have allowed it to be practised in its extreme form. Only the Brahmins of a lower order actually act as priests in the temples. Brahminism has never tried to force upon the Hindu a single way of life consonant with the highest Brahmin traditions. Still, any custom foreign to India would have great difficulty in finding a footing in that subcontinent if the Brahmins actively opposed it. The people in practise lead their lives as they will, but always within limits that do not make a serious break with the tradition which the Brahmin is considered as actively personifying and protecting by his prestige. This prestige at no time in history seems to have depended upon force.

12. The remaining parts of this paper will serve to justify this definition and to show at the same time those elements of natural religion in Hinduism which might serve as a vehicle for a Christian approach.

3.

The Land and the People

13. The human spirit because it is free is never entirely conditioned by the physical milieu in which it finds itself. Yet, circumstances of time and place exercise no small part in the expression of that human spirit. The energetic hardiness of the mountaineer, for example, is in striking contrast to the languid ease of the dwellers of the desert. Centuries of living in these separate atmospheres have produced distinct types which fit them for their respective regions alone. This is true not only of their physical frames but also of their public institutions. Christianity, while one in essentials everywhere, has been expressed by the Oriental in a manner entirely different from that which is proper to the Occidental. A history of the pre-Christian manner of living of the Oriental would show that Christianity purified but did not change the fundamental temper and tempo of the Oriental. His adherence to tradition and his love of bright display are just as evident in post-Christian times as in the preceding period. On the other hand, the Romans were masters of codifying law long before they applied their genius to writing the laws of the Church, whereas the Oriental code is being made for the first time in this generation.

14. A description of the land and the people of India will not show that the Hindus were determined by their surroundings to develop Hinduism, but from such a description it will appear most plausible that given even the germ of the modern Hindu temper, it would flourish in India, as indeed it has.

The Land

15. The name India itself is an indication of the form of the country, for India is not a name given by the people themselves, but by the English after their conquest. The people never had a word that was common to all of them for expressing their country. India, from north to south, stretches nearly 1,900 miles and its climate varies from the hottest regions of the Equator to high within the temperate zone, its northernmost tip being in almost the same latitude as Washington, D. C. The huge mass of the Himalayas cut it off from the rest of Asia. The few mountain passes that give access to northern India rise at some points to 18,000 feet.

16. This vast triangular sub-continent is divided into three distinct regions. The first is formed by the foothills of the Himalayas and is wild and mountainous; the second is made up of the river plains and stretches westward from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. This region contains the richest and most densely populated part of India where almost one half of the population lives. It was from this section that Hinduism spread to the other areas. The third region may be characterized as a high tableland which gradually slopes to the sea on the eastern and western sides of the tip of the triangle. This territory is called the Deccan. The northern part of it is mountainous, made up of a confused range of mountains running east and west and generally called the Vindhya mountains. The sloping eastern and western sides of this region are named the Eastern and Western Ghats. The Vindhya mountains, while not as high as the Himalayas, ranging in height from only 1,500 to 4,000 feet, formed an effective barrier between this region and the river plains, thus retarding a unity among the peoples.

17. This short picture of the geographic form of India presents a stage that conditioned to an enormous extent the character of Hinduism. Hinduism is the result of an attempt on the part of invading Aryans to assume control of the entire country. They never succeeded entirely in the south or the region of the Deccan because they could not enter the country in large numbers and

attain complete control. The invading Aryans were forced to compromise with the existing religious beliefs. This is clearly seen in Hinduism today, which is a melange of the highest and most primitive religious beliefs and practices. Indeed, the chief characteristic of Hinduism is its extreme pliability, capable of absorbing into its system the most diverse and contradictory elements.

18. But along with this variety, there exists an unmistakable element of homogeneity in the whole of India, which is its distinguishing mark. Except for recent years, India never expressed explicitly the cry "India for Indians and Indians for India," but she has always lived that principle. Whatever may be the diversity in India, it is always Indian. Even the Church is comparatively slow in her evangelization of India because Hindus regard the Church as foreign. The geographical isolation of the continent has fostered this attitude and has given Hinduism its uncompromising spirit.

19. The best example of these two characteristics of Hinduism may be seen in the reaction of the Hindu to the Mohammedan invasion. Coming in from the northwest, as most invaders did, the Muslims first entered India in 664 A.D. But it was only in the 11th century, under Mahmud of Ghazni, that the Punjab was conquered for Allah, and a century later, under Khusru, the first Mohammedan dynasty was established in Lahore. From that time until the annexation by England, India was ruled successively by Muslims and Mongols who came in around the 16th century. Yet, notwithstanding this foreign rule by representatives of one of the most missionary of religions and certainly the most uncompromising, Hinduism remained the religion and way of life of the vast majority of the people. Neither its doctrine nor its practise was affected materially by the invaders. In contrast to this stubborn resistance to Islamism, the Christian Middle East may be said to have given scarcely any resistance at all, for within a century after the death of Mohammed, Christianity had all but disappeared from that Mediterranean region. But even more remarkable is the fact that this resistance was

nowhere organized by a central religious group, nor was the resistance ever at any time based upon religious issues. The Muslims simply could not bring into the fold the pliant Hindus.

20. The very geographical factor that contributed greatly to the failure of Muslims has given Hinduism its distinctive characteristic, for Hinduism is *one* only in a kind of temper, but as *different* as there are different regions in India. Even today, with all the quick means of communication enabling armies to be moved, and with all the media of propaganda, India—and specifically the Dominion of India—could not be called a political unity such as the United States of America or Canada are. How much more greatly then in centuries past did the physical characteristic of India prevent a regimentation of all the people into a political or religious unity?

The People

21. A glance at the ethnographical history of India will help to shed some light on a striking quality of the Hindu mind—his readiness to accept vast social inequalities together with a firm conviction that the individual may in time bridge these abysmal gaps without the need of reforming the social system.

22. The earliest peoples of India left no records or monuments of themselves. Their existence is conjectured from an examination of the nearly 150 dialects of India. It may be noted here at the outset that such designations as Aryan, Indo-European have almost nothing to do with physical characteristics, but are based upon similarities of linguistic usage.

23. Five great groups may be said to have found their way into India and to have made some impress on the Hindu temper. The first and earliest of these were the Negritos who were very dark pygmies, four to five feet in height. The same type is now found in the Malayan and Philippine Islands as well as in the Andaman Islands of the Bay of Bengal. Traces of them are to be seen in the forest tribes of southern India, such as the Kadars of the Cochin forests. They must have come so long

ago and in comparatively such small numbers that they have left little or no impress in India.

24. These Negritos were soon driven out by the Australoids, who are allied to the brown race of southeastern Europe and the aborigines of Australia. Their descendants are still to be found among the more primitive of the southern Indian hill and forest tribes. They are mixed generally with all grades of society but appear less frequently in the higher classes.

25. Yet, even these Australoids are overshadowed by the great preponderance of Dravidians who came from the north-west, possibly from Asia Minor via Mesopotamia. They spread over the whole of India and were numerically strong in the south or Deccan region. These Dravidians form the basic type of the native, for the people who came after them were small in number and arrived long after the Dravidians had firmly settled themselves in the country. They practised an animistic worship of spirits and adored gods. They have left no monuments pre-dating the advent of the Aryans.

26. The Aryans were the fermenting and galvanizing force in India. These are the people who introduced Sanskrit into India and began the formation of Hinduism. Their earliest writings, the four Vedas, form the sacred books of the Hindu. The date of their arrival into India cannot be given with any certainty. Historians assign the approximate year of 1500 B.C. to the composition of the Vedas. These books do not show any indication that they were written in one generation, or that they are the invention of one group of contemporaneous minds. Rather they are the expression of an old tradition that grew up on Indian soil. These Aryans must have come into India long before 1500 B.C.

27. They settled in the district of the river plains where today all the sacred cities of Hindu culture are to be found, as well as its most sacred river, the Ganges. They were possibly allied to the Sumerians of Mesopotamia who preceded the semitic culture of the Babylonians in that region. (It may be noted

here that the Mesopotamian Sumarians, although physically conquered by the semitic Babylonians, imposed their culture to a great extent on the invaders. These Aryan Sumerians made possible the written Akkadic language of the Babylonians, and their gods formed the basis of the Babylonian pantheon.) Their sacred books show the invading Aryans to have lived in clans or groups of related families who in turn were collected into tribes, to whom the clan was subordinate. Various other terms of social significance are met with in the Vedas which imply subdivision of either tribe or clan. They all refer to a pastoral life and indicate a by no means high degree of cohesion. Alongside of these sections were two classes or orders, evidently of later development: the nobles, headed by a chieftain, and the ministers of religion who conducted the public sacrifices.

28. These Aryans most probably did not come in any large numbers, because the influence of their civilization among the Dravidians of the Deccan or south was of a missionary, not political or military character. The Dravidians, even though in the course of time they accepted the caste system and revered the Brahmins, did not give up their local gods and ceremonies. A cloak of Brahmanic authority was thrown over these local deities and ceremonial, but beyond the introduction of a certain contingent of Brahmins as teachers and advisers, no Aryan blood was transfused into the population. It seems that only a few communities in the Eastern Ghat have claimed a northern origin. Even today service at a temple is not undertaken by the better class of Brahmin, as it is held to be degrading and is left accordingly to those in low station. The inference drawn from this estimation of temple service is that the divinities in question are those predating the advent of the Aryans and have been incorporated from time to time into the Brahmianic pantheon.

29. The meeting of these two tempers—that of the cultured Aryan and the presumably illiterate Dravidian with his dogged retention of ancient religious practises—explains a great deal in Hinduism. The Aryan by his superiority, possibly even in arms, imposed himself upon the inferior Dravidian and gradually there

grew up a social system where the Aryan priest and soldier were accepted as superior to the native. Actually, the Indian word for caste, *varna,* means *color,* so that it may be conjectured that in the beginning the caste system was a social means invented by the numerically inferior Aryans to exercise superiority over the numerically superior but illiterate and polytheistic Dravidians. Possibly, the Aryans at first had three classes among themselves—the priest, warrior and landowning merchant. The native population was all outcast. In imitation of the Aryans, they formed Castes among themselves, and thus the custom grew.

30. This seems to be a rationalization of a past event, but the above explanation does not seek to explain every element of human temper of the Hindu. Given a tendency, however, to accept social inequality, the above conditions would tend only to confirm that tendency and make it an integral part of the popular mind. Such seems to have happened in India. Likewise, the physical divisions of India contributed not a little to making it impossible for the Aryans to keep their religion entirely pure among the Dravidian population when these latter chose to retain elements of their pre-Hindu pantheons.

31. The people who followed the Aryans into India were the mass of Alexander the Great's soldiers and camp-followers, some two thousand years later at least. The influence upon the general population was meager, except for providing an inspiration to Hindu sculpture which is still noticeable. This apparent failure of Alexander is the sign and sure test of the success of the Aryans. In the first place, Alexander did not merely enter by some northwestern passage, look down upon the vast regions of India and turn back; he penetrated into the great land; he even founded cities. In the second place, the armies of Alexander had elsewhere formed the vanguard of Hellenic culture, which was eagerly accepted by the conquered populations. In other words, Alexander had conquered India but left no enduring impress upon the mass of the people, who did not accept the Hellenic ideas but only the external mannerisms of Hellenic sculpture. Hinduism seems not to have been affected in any noticeable manner at all by the Hellenic invasion.

32. Persians, Scythians, Kushans from Central Asia, Muslims from the west and Mongols, all likewise, came into India. Notwithstanding the long rule of the Muslims over India, their invasion, too, must be regarded as a comparative failure in the light of their great successes elsewhere. Moreover, Islam was forced to compromise with Hinduism in the sense that it never made any concerted effort to drive Hinduism from India but lived alongside it.

Conclusion

33. The preceding sketch of the land and people of India shows the background upon which Hinduism is most easily painted. There exists a principle of unity which springs from the isolation of the sub-continent. Within this land, however, because of the broken, uneven quality of the terrain, divisions could and did arise. The southern region, or the Deccan, never seems to have given up at any time its tendency to retain its old traditions, while at the same time it was not loath to adapt new forms according to its own choice. The people of this land have many diverse strains in them, but the Aryans succeeded in giving them all a single type of temper which, however, finds expression according to local conditions. The Aryans had settled in the central or river plain region, while to the south the Dravidians in the Deccan never entirely were assimilated by them. If the early religion of the Aryans (which later became Hinduism) was ever uncompromising, demanding a full acceptation with the complete rejection of the old, their experience with the Dravidians of the south soon taught them to compromise and allow religious forms which originally did not belong and perhaps would never have belonged to Hinduism had the Dravidians been more tractable. The fusion of these two tempers, that of the Aryan and of the Dravidian, has given Hinduism its two most striking qualities—its uncompromising demand that whatever is in India be Indian (and in these times therefore Hindu) and secondly, its plastic flexibility which allows monotheism and animism to exist under the name of one religion.

4.

History of Hinduism

34. One thing with certainty may be said about Hinduism: the present form of it may be traced backwards to the dawn of recorded history in India. This does not mean that Hinduism had from the very beginning a deposit of doctrine that gradually developed in the sense that Christian doctrine has unfolded itself by making explicit what was contained already implicitly, but that at no time did Hinduism make a noticeable break with the old, nor did it introduce any innovation which had to be forced upon the people. Hinduism gradually grew and in the course of its growth it was docilely accepted. This is most remarkable considering that these same docile Hindus as a whole rejected Jannism, Buddhism and Islamism. They have shown themselves slow to accept Christianity.

I. Religions before Hinduism

Animism

35. The desire to placate hidden forces of nature has prompted many peoples throughout the world to worship them as personified. The primitive people of India, the Dravidians, proved no exception. Many tribes today still observe this form of worship. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that such worship does not gain any official recognition in the sacred books or other writings of the Hindus, these peoples are accepted as Hindus of a lower class. Herein may be seen the difference

between Hinduism and Brahminism. Such peoples could be classed as professing Hinduism (which is doctrinally amorous) but in no sense are they followers of the Brahmin doctrine (which, if anything, is not animistic). Yet at the same time, both the primitive animist and the high class Brahmin are both Hindus.

Idol Worship

36. Idol worship existed in India long before 1500 B.C., the traditional date of the writing of the Vedas or sacred books of the Hindus. At Mohenjo-Daro in the Larkana district between the main bed of the Indus River and the western Nara Canal, there have been discovered the remains of a city that dates back to at least 3000 B.C. The inhabitants practised a high degree of civilization for those times. The houses were large and had wells, drains and bathrooms. The central building was extensive, containing a large, well built swimming pool.

37. The archaeological remains show that they practised idol worship, mixed with animism. The chief images found represent a god and a goddess. The god has three faces, suggestive of the three eyes of Siva, the Hindu god who is the principle of preservation. There is evidence that they also worshipped the phallus.

38. These people seem not to have been of Indian origin, but more probably came over the northwest passages to the Indus and stopped there. The few seals that have been found are quite similar to those made by the Sumerians in Mesopotamia. But their language is not Sumerian and has not yet been deciphered. Their influence on the rest of India can be discounted.

39. The Dravidians, who still today form the vast mass of the population of India, account for the rampant polytheism of Hinduism. What the precise forms of worship were among these people before the advent of the Aryans cannot be learned, because the influence of the invaders has been completely woven into the web and woof of Indian life. Still, it can with certainty be asserted that the Dravidians were polytheistic before

they became Hindus and remained polytheistic afterwards, even to such an extent as to have changed the character of the religion which they accepted.

II. Hinduism

40. Four periods or points of time may be recognized as important in the history of Hindus. These are: the Vedantic period, as known from the four Vedas or sacred books of the Hindus, that of the rise and fall of Buddhism, from the 1st to the 3rd century, the incursions of the Muslims, including the Mongols, which reached their fullest influence under Akbar the Great, and the European influence.

The Religion of the Vedas

41. The Vedas present a picture of life in the river plain region of India to which no specific date may be assigned. It is commonly accepted that the Vedas had attained their present form about the year 1500 B.C. but they were the result of an oral tradition, the beginnings of which must have reached back to a remote past. The immigrating Aryans are shown to be in complete possession of the river plain area, but no mention is made of the time of their entrance into India. It is taken for granted that they are the leaders of the people. The Dravidians as such are not mentioned, but their presence may be surmised from the fact that the priestly and warrior classes (made up of Aryans) are set apart from and are regarded as superior to the rest of the population. Slavery as a distinctly recognizable institution did not exist.

42. The Vedas show that the people of the time were living a pastoral life, divided into clans and tribes. Their life was nomadic to a great extent—a fact which explains why they left no monuments. Possibly because of their nomadic life, they did not worship images or idols, but the forces behind nature were given names and adored. Thus they adored Dhatri, the Establisher, Vidhatri, the Ordainer, Visvakarman, the all-Creating, Prajapati, Lord of Creatures, Sraddha, Faith and

Manyu, Wrath. The familiar gods of the modern Hindu Pantheon, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva were not known. There are vague references that might be understood as referring to Krishna, but the two chief deities of their pantheon were Varuna and Indra, the God of War.

43. Throughout this literature there is in evidence a marked tendency towards monotheism or certainly henotheism. Thus in one of the poems, it is said,

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna,
And Agni: he is the heavenly bird Garutmat:
To what is One, the poets give many a name,
They call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.

44. The religion of that time did not directly affect the whole social life of the people. The caste system, which is not exclusively a religious expression, did not exist. The insistence upon higher human values to be found in the mortification of the individual is not as noticeable as in the later works, such as the Upanishads and Brahmanas. In other words, the religion of India, as known from the records that have come down, differs completely from millenium to millenium. This does not signify merely a difference in externals, or in the emphasis upon elements that previously existed in germ, but the whole institution is different.

Hinduism and Buddhism

45. The 6th century before Christ witnessed an abortive revolution from Hinduism (or more particularly from Brahmianism) which makes it possible to recognize a stage in the development of Hinduism. If Buddhism had not appeared at this time it is unlikely that it would be possible to note any particular stage in the growth of Hinduism, as far as any records exist. It would have been merely a fully developed Hinduism, hardly differing in any respect from that of today. In the 6th century it is seen in the process of change.

46. There is little in Buddhism that is not to be found in Hinduism, but the emphasis on points of doctrine make the two

religions entirely distinct entities. What made Buddha a heretic in the eyes of the Hindu was his insistence upon the point that man by his free will, without appeals and offerings to the gods, could work out his purification and reach absorption into the Absolute. He found no place or need of the caste system and while he did not openly reject the gods of Hinduism, he gave them no notice in his system. The outstanding change worked by Gautama Buddha was that he appealed to all the people without distinction of class or past history. This was contrary to the then existing form of Hinduism.

47. Hinduism at that time might be said to be made up of two religions, one esoteric or the religion of the priests, the Brahmins, and the other exoteric, or the religion of the people. This latter religion was a compromise between the indigenous beliefs of the people in local gods and magical practises and the old Vedic or strictly Brahmin beliefs. As long as the priests were recognized as the leading holy men of the land, the people were allowed to practise whatever they chose. At this time, the so-called Hindu trinity of Brahma, Siva and Vishnu came into prominence. While Vishnu is mentioned in the Vedas, Siva is not. Certainly the three gods were not before this time so mentioned together, and Vishnu is given a place he previously never held. Up to this time, instruction in the sacred writings of the Hindus was confined strictly to the priestly class. The people were deliberately kept away from the Vedas. The Brahmanas and the Upanishads had been set into writing. The Brahmanas are merely commentaries on the Vedas and are lengthy in the extreme. The Upanishads, which received their final form in the century of Buddha, show that the priests have begun to speculate on the nature of the gods and the end of man. It is significant that these speculations should coincide with the appearance of Gautama Buddha, who himself was not alone in that century in speculating about religion. But most significant of all is the fact that the Brahmins in this century began the composition of the Sutras, which were summaries of the ceremonies to be observed in the proper observance of Hindu rites and customs *and were intended for the layman.*

48. Buddha himself did not cause a complete overturn of Hinduism nor did he change its internal development. Rather he accelerated it. In the lifetime of Buddha, his religion had little influence except in a few isolated places. But three centuries after his death, Asoka, who became ruler of India, was converted to Buddhism shortly before he died, and in three years conducted an intensive missionary campaign throughout India. In keeping with the Indian character, this campaign was a bloodless one, but extraordinary in its efforts to help raise the living standard of the forgotten man, of whom there were a vast majority in India at the time. The fact that Asoka did not meet with open opposition from the Brahmins is an indication that the Brahmins had not imposed on the people their religion in such a way that he could expect aid from them. In fact, the whole history of this time serves to emphasize greatly the Indian temper to accept whatever is Indian, and certainly Buddhism was that. There is no account that would show that the Hindus in any way sought to oppose Buddhism. Moreover, the support of King Asoka to Buddhism did not seem to cause any change in the life of the people, which would indicate that the caste system was not strongly established among them as yet. The rejection of the support of the Brahmin priests by Asoka seems to have caused no resentment or reaction.

49. The appearance of Buddhism in India is less striking than its disappearance. The word "disappearance" is used advisedly, for with the death of Asoka, Buddhism merely ceased in India. It spread into Ceylon and Burma and from there into China but it dropped into insignificance in India. History does not tell of any persecution of Buddhists, nor does it give any picture of the rebirth of Hinduism after Asoka. This is all the more remarkable in view of the tremendous influence which Buddhism has exerted in other parts of the world. What was it or what is there in Hinduism that has enabled it to withstand such a shock with no apparent impairment or violent reaction on its own part?

50. While this phenomenon in itself seems inexplicable, it does help to explain how Hinduism came into India. First of all, the quiet rejection of Buddhism would tend to show that Hinduism contains some elements that are deeply in sympathy with the Indian temper. This in turn would indicate that even the religion of the Vedas does not contain a purely Aryan religious importation, but that many indigenous elements were assimilated by the Aryans almost from the very beginning. The Aryan Vedic priests retained their old beliefs, but allowed the people to exercise many of their older rites and customs. In the earliest times, the tradition was a strictly oral one, so that the illiteracy of the people did not prevent them from an active participation in the knowledge of the whole religion, so long as their memories were strong. The size of the Vedas in their written form leads to the conclusion that they are a collection of oral traditions from many different parts of India. When, however, these traditions were set to writing and were given the exclusive authority of being sacred, the active participation of the generality of the people in the traditional religion was greatly circumscribed. This fact is further corroborated by this, that the Brahmanas had to be written some five hundred years later for the instruction of even the priests. It was during this period when Hinduism began to break up into an esoteric and exoteric religion that the greater masses of the Dravidians of the south were won over to the then existing form of Hinduism, and these Dravidians in turn, being kept from learning the Vedistic traditions because of their illiteracy, added to Hinduism the rampant and gross polytheism which is characteristic of it today. This seems not to have been accomplished by any force of arms or any strong moral persuasion by ruling kings.

51. Buddhism, however, showed one great weakness in the Hindu system. There was no unifying element of a public, visible character. After the reign of Asoka, that weakness was corrected; that is, the caste system was given its definitive form and was given a religious significance through Buddha's heresy. He had emphasized metempsychosis and had taught the doctrine

of the "Karma," that is, in any given lifetime the individual must by his life make up for the transgressions of his previous existence. The priests pressed this doctrine into service for imposing the caste system more rigidly upon the people, by teaching that one must go through a series of re-incarnations and in the course of these gradually come to a state of purification or cessation of desires, whereby they would be absorbed into the Absolute. The Brahmin, by the very fact that he was a Brahmin, was looked upon as being already as close as any living known mortal to complete purification, and if in his own lifetime he practised all the requirements of his caste, he could be deified.

The Moslem Conquest

52. Nearly a millenium passed before Hinduism, which, in the meantime, almost as it is known today, had taken a firm grip upon the people, had to meet any strong opponent. The caste system tended to become formalized to the extent that people began gradually to shift from their traditional occupations assigned them by the caste to which they belonged and began to enter callings which had no relation to the caste. Some of the Gupta rulers sought to correct this departure from tradition but to no avail. Actually, this fluidity in the caste system, which seems to have always been inherent in it, has proved to be the greatest strength of Hinduism. For while all Hindus regard the caste as a part of the religion, at the same time circumstances of history have made it practically impossible to keep to any rigid observance of whatever may have been the original religious significance of caste. When the Hindu had to meet the Moslem and later his even more formidable enemy, the English, he had made the caste a most pliable instrument.

53. The extent of Moslem domination over India has hardly been realized. At first, in the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries the Muslims were only sporadically successful in India, but in the 11th century they established political control of most of India. The greatest opposition came to them from the south, the traditionally indigenous section of India, which even the sword of Islam

could not conquer. The temper of the people, their great numbers and the conformation and size of the land made it impossible for the Muslims to succeed completely (other than in the political field). Even today, less than one fourth of India is Muslim and its influence is restricted to definite areas near the northeastern and northwestern borders.

54. Islam met a well organized, fairly content population living according to the rules of the various castes and making their means of livelihood thereby. A comparison with the success of Islam in other countries and with the success it achieved in India would tend to show that the social and economic conditions of India were better than in the Middle East. Hilaire Belloc claims that Islam spread so rapidly throughout the Middle East, not because of the attraction of the doctrine itself, but because Islam held out to the enslaved and debt-burdened populations the opportunity to rid themselves of the twofold chain of slavery and debt and to begin life anew. Now in India there was no slavery as such, although people did live in conditions that could hardly be distinguished from that state. Apparently because of the caste system each one could find a means of life and, furthermore, a sense of personal dignity. The doctrinal element of the Koran seems, therefore, not to have offered any improvement for the Hindu either in this life or the next.

55. Islam, in the sense that it is totalitarian, failed in India. Not only did it fail but it was forced to compromise with Hinduism to the degree that what was to it the meaningless system of the caste was accepted and remains so even to this day. The foreign Muslim was forced to live side by side with the native Hindu, or rather, the native Hindu continued to live unperturbed by the presence of the foreign Muslim. There is no account of organized persecution of the Hindu by the Moslem on any large scale.

56. Even the engulfment of India into the empire of the Moguls seems not to have affected the vitality of Hinduism in any noticeable degree. The opposite seems to have been the case.

The Muslim sought a means to compromise with the Hindu. This is best illustrated by the reign of Akbar the Great (1556-1605). During his lifetime he was called the Guardian of Mankind. He was most kind and just to his people and sought in every way to alleviate the condition of his subjects. Although born a Muslim, he invented an eclectic form of religion which was in origin partly Persian or Zoroastrian. He did not impose this religion on the people by force but like Asoka, his predecessor by nearly two thousand years, he offered it to them. At the same time, he allowed freedom of worship for the Hindu. He was no more successful than Asoka was with Buddhism. After Akbar's death, his religion soon ceased to be known in India and Hinduism continued to be the dominant faith.

European Influence

57. The impress of Europe upon India and Hinduism seems to have come from commercial and political sources rather than religious ones. There is a simple explanation of this. Hinduism does not contain a set system of teachings which must be observed as a minimum by all both as far as internal assent and external practise are concerned. Internal assent seems not to be required of the Hindu at all. External practise can vary so greatly that a Christian could hardly be recognized as such except in a church of European construction. This is one of the reasons why there never has been an organized persecution of the Church in India. It might be unpopular because it is not Indian entirely in its origin. Individual Christians might incur the wrath of Hindus by slighting their conventions, customs and rites, but the religion in the abstract would not find organized opposition and persecution.

58. Political and commercial forces, however, had a different and far more reaching effect. The foreign markets would demand large supplies of particular articles. The caste system as a result has been pushed more and more into the limited circle of the family and social areas; for the same company of merchants would hire, according to need, as many hands as possible for

their work, no matter what their caste. Consequently, today it may be said that the caste is observed more carefully in the poorer, rural areas, but is less in evidence in the prosperous and urban centres. As business continues to increase, its demands are becoming greater, and, just as elsewhere in the world, commerce is demanding in India sacrifices of leisure and social and religious observance which the combined forces of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity have not been able to effect.

59. Politically, the advent of the Portuguese, Dutch and English has been of tremendous importance for India. Modern governments all have the same materialistic point of view and are being absorbed more and more by economic exigencies to regard the State as the guardian of orderly commerce, subordinating all other elements, religious and educational, to that purpose. The English at first allowed the Hindu to practise his religion in whatever way he would, but gradually laid restrictions on its grosser forms such as the burning of widows. But most important of all, England during the period of her rule of empire developed a new thing among the Hindus, who were ripe for the innovation—a sense of Indian nationality was encouraged among them. At the same time, for the sake of greater ease in commerce and government, the Indians were encouraged to learn English and identify the destinies of India with those of the Western world. As a result of this training, the more modern Hindu, now ruling himself, is an intense nationalist, demanding more than ever that India be kept for the Indians. The division of India into the Dominion of India and Pakistan has been made along strictly religious lines.

60. The Western commercial and political influences have not corrupted Hinduism because there was no definite form to corrupt. They have, however, tended to emphasize the more speculative pantheistic side of Hinduism in various writings and translations. Through these writings, and because of this great interest on the part of Europeans and Americans, these Indian speculations have become widely known in the Western world and are regarded as the common doctrine of the average Hindu. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

61. The aims of Mahatma Gandhi best illustrate the effect of the secular mind of Occidental universities upon the Hindu. Gandhi was trained at Oxford and became a lawyer. While evincing a sympathy for Christian teaching, he never embraced Christianity. On the other hand, his interest in the traditional Hindu way of life was small indeed. He was interested in establishing a single Indian state, governed by its own people without distinction of caste or religion. Rajendra Prasad, the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, on January 26, 1947, reiterated this aim of Gandhi. He said: "We should never allow ourselves to think that India belongs to the followers of any one religion and that the others have no rights here." Gandhi thereby struck at the roots of the caste system. While it is true that the caste system is not essentially either in origin or present practice a religious institution, the removal of the caste system by a sudden stroke of legislation would take the props from under the whole Hindu tradition, *as it is practised by the average Hindu.* Certainly, Gandhi demonstrated a most unselfish devotion to his cause. He proclaimed by his life that there are higher human values than creature comforts and power gained by force. But Gandhi was to India and Hinduism what many modern Hegelian ministers are to what remains of the teachings of the Protestants in this country. For the sake of temporary, visible gains (most of them good) in this world, they are ready to sacrifice the whole understructure which would give meaning to a striving for those gains. This process of indifferentism to the traditional religion has traveled far in the Occidental world. It has begun only in the last half century to make its first efforts in India. The new government of India may in the course of time foster the same indifferentism. If it does, the efforts of the Church to win India will be greatly hampered.

5.

The Religion of the Hindus

62. The Hindu religion is more a matter of traditional practice than of logical belief. The century old traditions with their accompanying joyous celebrations have become so much a part of the life of the people that usage itself has become for most Hindus their only (and at the same time) most effective teacher and legislator. Yet Hinduism is an ecleticism of many heterogeneous elements with no central guide either as to the present observance or to the legitimacy of introducing new or rejecting old usages. Enough has already been said in the preceding pages to demonstrate that it would be impossible to give in a few pages a concise specific summary of the whole pantheon which contains more than 300,000 deities. The manner of sacrifice likewise differs in place to place, so that it would be well nigh out of the question to begin to treat of this matter at any length. Whatever doctrine is held in Hinduism comes from the Brahmins and is perpetuated by them.

63. In the first place, the Brahmins make little of the deities—a fact which is not surprising considering that traditionally from the very beginning the Brahmins tended towards at least a speculative henotheism if not a monotheism. What Father Dubois in his notable work, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies,* said of the Brahmins more than a century ago holds even more truly today:

> The histories of their gods are so ridiculous and so extravagant

that it is not surprising that the Brahmins are at heart conscious of the absurdity of worshipping such beings. There is, therefore, very little danger incurred in ridiculing the gods in the presence of the Brahmins. Very often they agree with the scoffer, and even enlarge upon what he has said. Many Brahmins can repeat by heart songs and verses that treat with very scanty respect the divinities which they worship so ostentatiously in public, while their audience listens without any sign of disapproval. Brahmins have no fear of such conduct calling forth reproof or punishment. The Sudras (those of the lowest castes including the Pariahs) who are more simple and credulous than the Brahmins, would not be so indulgent under similar circumstances, and it would be particularly imprudent to ridicule any particular god of theirs in the presence of those who are specially devoted to them. (p. 296)

64. This attitude of the Brahmins is particularly of great significance in view of the fact that they alone are regarded as fit to study and teach the Sacred Books. There is, therefore, a wide gulf between the learned Brahmin's doctrine and the average Hindu's belief and practice.

65. The Brahmins are for the most part pantheistic in their speculations, which fact enables them to accept any Hindu divinity as a manifestation of the one supreme all pervading Being. No attempt, however, is made by them to show the exact relationship between this Being and all the deities of the pantheon. The origins of the so-called Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are clouded over with stories that are reminiscent of the ribaldry and licentiousness of Aristophanes and Plautus. It is shocking, however, to learn that these deities are associated with the following concept of the One in their writings:

> God who is the Author and Creator of all beings; eternal immaterial, omnipresent, independent, in all things, blessed, exempt from pain and care; the spirit of truth, the source of all justice; governor, dispensator, regulator of all things, perfect in wisdom and knowledge; without shape or countenance, without limit, without nature, without name, without caste, without parentage; of an absolute purity which excludes all passion, all bias, all compromise. Dubois (p. 297)

66. The attitude towards their gods is, in general, a contradictory one. It indicates that the Hindus do not regard their deities or even the supreme Being as the author and centre of morality, who in *every* instance is offended by their thoughts, words and deeds. Thus in the outward public veneration of them, the Hindus are most careful and exacting, whereas in their thoughts and words privately they will revile them. What is publicly regarded as wrong may be practised as an *act of religion* in secret. Thus eating beef, drinking alcoholic liquors and adultery are gravely forbidden generally, but all these form essential parts of the rite of sakti-puja. As Dubois (p. 296) says:

> Sometimes it is the wife of Siva to whom this sacrifice is offered; sometimes they pretend that it is in honor of some invisible power. The ceremony takes place at night with more or less secrecy. The least disgusting of these orgies are those where they confine themselves to eating and drinking everything that the custom of the country forbids, and where men and women, huddled together in indiscriminate confusion, openly and shamelessly violate the commonest laws of decency and modesty.

The followers of Vishnu also practise such rites in his honor, having no regard to caste, laws of eating and drinking and the sacred ties of marriage, for during these ceremonies all the women present become common property. Indeed, the husband has no right to complain even if he is the witness of his wife's infidelity.

67. There is, however, one common point of doctrine for all Hindus. That is the doctrine of *karma*. This doctrine is based upon that of metempsychosis and, according to it, every man is destined to as many re-incarnations as are required to purify himself to such a degree that he is absorbed into the One; whatever present life or re-incarnation a person is enjoying, he is convinced that during it he must suffer for the defects of the previous re-incarnation. The Brahmin by his very position is regarded as the closest to absorption into the One. But even among the Brahmins there are degrees of purification which can be lived by observing all of the Brahmin precepts. Very few reach the third and perfect state of purification.

68. Buddha recognized the determinism inherent in Hinduism which taught that sacrifices to the gods did not avail for purification and thereby broke away from Hinduism by his doctrine of free will. But this doctrine of Karma seems to be the key to the whole Hindu temper and the religion. Even heaven and hell are temporary places. They who go to the abodes of the blessed go there only for a time, but eventually undergo a re-incarnation and during this re-incarnation purify themselves to the extent that they finally enjoy absorption into the One. Those who go to hell remain there but for a time (which may be very long) and eventually are re-incarnated as some lower form of life. For even these there is the hope that after many re-incarnations they will be united with the One.

69. This doctrine explains the horror of the Hindus for flesh meat, especially beef, and their disdain for all who earn their living by treating, decorating or repairing leather. It also throws some light on the apparent contradictions of Hindu life. This life is the only one they know but they are convinced that there will be others and even better lives for them. At any event, they are convinced that this is not their last chance to attain eternal happiness (which for them is a nebulous cessation of their own individuality). Thus some take the longer chance and live only for this world, while others endeavor to reach perfection as soon as possible. Because the whole doctrine has for its foundation the purification of the soul and the denial of gross materialism, the temper of the people for worldly things is hardly existent. They enjoy them while they possess them but do not regard them as the sole end of living. They are content with incredibly little and suffer enormous hardships without murmuring.

70. Their devotion to tradition has favored a strong family. This has been accomplished, however, by reducing the woman to absolute subjection. English rule alone has stopped the once prevalent practice of burning widows with the deceased husband. This was the ultimate in the Laws of Manu but the rules governing the conduct of women are most rigid indeed. As a result of

them, the women have been formed by tradition into a group most dignified and decent in their behavior, notwithstanding the surprising circumstance that many unmarried women are victims of prostitution, while in former times temples did not scruple to supply them for the performance of *worthy acts of religion*. Dubois, who was well aware of the licentiousness of the Hindus, has nothing but the highest praise for the married Hindu woman.

71. Monogamy is the tradition among the Hindus. It is violated only by the more powerful rulers, in which case polygamy is tolerated but not approved of nor condoned. Divorce is permitted in the case of the wife's adultery, but the disgrace brought upon the family by such misconduct retards families from resorting to divorce except in extreme cases. Births, marriages and deaths are surrounded with minutely prescribed rituals. Before the coming of the English, it was the custom for the widow of the husband to be burnt along with his body. Dubois gives descriptions of two such terrifying incidents.

72. The purity of the Hindu marriage law seems to have nothing to do with the religion as such immediately, for most of the gods and goddesses were notorious for their disregard of it. The laws of marriage have taken such a hold on the people because of the importance of the caste system. This will be seen in the next section.

73. Virginity among the Hindus was recognized rather as a fact that a virtue of the will. This is emphasized in the story of Anusooya, the virgin goddess whom the Trimurti, that is, the Brahmin trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, tried to seduce. Anusooya by magic turned the three of them into a calf and would have kept them so forever except that all the female deities came to her and begged that she free them. She agreed on condition that *they all commit adultery which they did*. (How far removed the traditional Catholic concept of virginity is from the minds of even European Christians can be seen from this interesting sidelight. The above story is given in Dubois' *Customs and Manners*. At the end of the paragraph telling this account, the editor appends a note as follows: "Hindus would

say that these stories were not intended to illustrate the immorality of their gods, but to affirm that a chaste woman is proof even against divine (sic) temptation." (That note requires no comment.)

6.

The Caste System

74. It is often loosely said by Hindu and Occidental alike that the caste system is not peculiar to India, for it exists in reality under different names in nearly every other nation of the world. This is not true, because the caste system of the Hindus possesses peculiar characteristics which the division into classes elsewhere does not have.

75. In the first place, the caste system has come to be in India the vehicle through which religion has been made part and parcel of the everyday life of the people. Perhaps nowhere else in the world has religion been made so much a part of the people's lives. It is true that by daily prayers which are *suggested* by the Church every act of a Christian may be sanctified, but it is left to the decision of the individual where and how often these prayers may be said. By means of the caste system, every act of a Hindu is determined and is given a religious significance. From birth to death, through marriage, widowhood, joy and sorrow the caste not only has suggestions which the individual may follow but actually definite actions are determined.

76. In the second place, the Hindu caste system has for its keystone the priestly class. This class is not known to have been imposed upon the people by force of arms. There is no attempt on the part of civil rulers to usurp the priest in this respect. At the same time, the people accept the priest's higher position voluntarily. Nowhere in India does there exist a hierarchy of the

Brahmin class which dictates to the people. Everything has been determined by tradition many centuries before, and all, both Brahmin and other castes, conform to this tradition which is so complicated and diverse that it defies definition. There is no single book to which one may go to determine the conduct of each caste. The whole unwieldy uncodified and complex mass must be learned by living the tradition and having an almost innate sense of what is fitting according to it. On the priestly class rests the existence and meaning of all the other more than 3,000 castes and sub-castes. It is common in India for a caste or sub-caste of lower degree to try to raise itself in the public estimation by better practices. A group may endeavor to do so, but their success is measured by their acceptance by the Brahmin. If the Brahmin will accept water from the hands of members of this new group, it is regarded as clean. If the Brahmin does not, it is unclean. The people of this new caste do not go to a central Brahmin headquarters (which does not exist) for registration. It is sufficient if the local Brahmins accept the preferred water.

77. There are four main castes which are divided almost to infinity. These are: the Brahmins, who are the priests; the Kshatriyas, who are the warriors; the Vaisyas, who dedicate themselves in the main to agriculture, trade and cattle-breeding, and finally the Sudras who perform the various duties of artisan employment and manual labor. These last, with their numerous subdivisions, form the greater bulk of the Hindu population.

78. The castes are preserved by careful selection in marriage and by rules which forbid them to eat with certain other castes. At first glance this may seem impossible, but consider the single fact that the Church does not permit indiscriminate marriage with non-Catholics. By this simple legislation alone, Catholics have been marked in whatever community they live. Likewise it is the common teaching of the Church that mixed marriages cause defections from the Church and thereby tend to make her disappear from any given community. The rule of Friday abstinence will distinguish all practising Catholics at any banquet. It may seem facetious to suppose a banquet of non-

Catholics and Catholics, who in turn are subdivided into laity and religious, who again in turn are subdivided into Carmelites, Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits and Trappists, all with their special rules of fast and abstinence. It would be impossible for one kitchen to satisfy the demands and variety of diet thereby required. So, too, is it with the castes. It is commonly said in India, "Thirteen Brahmins, thirteen cooking stoves."

79. Because of the centuries-old cynical neglect of the Pariahs who are outcasts, the caste system of India is regarded as an evil by Occidentals. No doubt there are evils inherent in the system, but it should be remembered that this same system has made possible the highly developed civilization of India, which grew independently of any other culture. Every art and craft was handed down from father to son and while the implements were not noticeably improved with the course of time, the skill with which these simple tools were used has increased so that today India is justly famed for her own arts and crafts. The Europeans who sought a water route to India were not just curious explorers. They knew the wealth and magnificence of India, which far rivalled that of Europe even in the 15th century. Dubois points out the degradation to which the Pariahs have sunk and says that had there not been the caste system in India, that subcontinent would today be peopled by a population not much highly removed from them. This statement is merely a conjecture because the people who chose the caste system might have developed something else. But the fact remains that they did choose the system and by means of it have nurtured a high degree of civilization.

80. It should not be supposed, however, that each member of a caste is restricted to the occupation of his caste. Thus, for example, the Brahmins, who are recognized as the priests, in many instances because of poverty are forced to accept the occupation of cook. They are popular as such because all castes may accept food from their hands. But even in this menial state, the high position of the Brahmin is recognized. He prepares and serves the food but does not take up the remains of the meal if

the diners are of an inferior caste. Similarly, the Kshatriyas often become farmers, which work properly belongs to the Sudra or lowest caste. In such cases, a distinction is sometimes made. Thus a Kshatriya may in case of necessity put his foot upon a plough, but will not guide it with his hands.

81. Before the advent of the English there was no code of laws for the whole of India. The guru or holy men of each local group of any caste exercised tremendous power over the members. He could even dispense the death sentence. The rules of each caste were most scrupulously observed, often bringing great hardship and cruelty upon the members. English law modified these to a great extent and commerce has tended to oblige the Hindus not to be too particular in observing the rules of eating and social greeting in large centers of population and in great gatherings of people.

82. Dubois, writing nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, saw the advent of English law and Occidental commercial methods into India. He says:

> It is, to my mind, a vain hope to suppose that we can really very much improve the condition of the Hindus, or raise their circumstances of life to the level prevailing in Europe. The efforts of a Government which is humane and generous, as well as just, may succeed up to a certain point in lessening some of their hardships; but as long as it is in the nature of Hindus to cling to their civil and religious institutions, to their old customs and habits, they must remain what they have always been, for there are so many insurmountable obstacles in the path of progress and to the attainment of a new order of things better calculated to bring them happiness. They will continue to grovel in poverty as long as their physical and intellectual faculties continue in the same groove.
>
> Therefore, to make a new race of the Hindus, one would have to begin by undermining the very foundations of their civilization, religion and polity, and by turning them into atheists and barbarians. Having accomplished this terrible upheaval, we might then perhaps offer ourselves to them as lawgivers and religious teachers. But even then our task would only be half

accomplished. After dragging them out of the depths of barbarism, anarchy, and atheism into which we had plunged them and after giving them new laws, a new polity and a new religion, we should still have to give them new natures and different inclinations. Otherwise we should run the risk of seeing them soon relapse into their former state, which would be worse, if anything, than before.

83. How much of this prophecy of Dubois has been realized may be judged today. After one hundred and fifty years, Hinduism, modified as it has been by so many years of English law, is still as vigorous as before, if not more so. The people have adapted themselves in peculiar Indian fashion to the changes of the times and have preserved their individuality. The new constitution for India has nullified the significance of caste in the government. This has been voluntarily done by Hindus themselves and shows that the caste system is not essentially a necessary and omnipresent part of their religion. The people of India have in the past two thousand years and more adapted themselves to so many changes and misfortunes that it is unlikely that they will sink to a low level of barbarism. Because Hinduism consists more in the observance of idol worship with its attendant pleasures and less in doctrine, it is more probable that it will be able to find a modus vivendi in the modern world.

7.

Hinduism and Catholicism

84. A superficial reading of the Sacred Hindu writings, especially in translations made by philologists who are bent on proving that all religions are fundamentally the same, both as to origin and final end, would give the impression that there is much in common between Hinduism and Catholicism. Hindu asceticism, which is most rigorous, strikes a sympathetic note in the Catholic. But great care should be taken in finding the meaning of the words in the Hindu system.

85. An example closer to home will suffice. As Archbishop of York, William E. Temple delivered two sermons at Harvard University. Both of them were strikingly Catholic in tone, so much so that much of them could be used in any Catholic pulpit for a sermon on the Mystical Body of Christ. But a few years later, the same Archbishop delivered the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, which were subsequently entitled "Nature, Man and God." Therein he openly denies the validity of Aristotelian logic and scouts the idea that God is immutable, going even so far as to claim that the attribute of immutability would be a defect in God. For him, God is the soul of the world without which he could not exercise his divinity. As a consequence all things are equally an expression of the divinity. Christ is not God in the sense that a personal divinity, distinct from the world, assumed a human nature but, according to the Archbishop, Christ is divine in the sense that He was the highest expression of God in the world. There is

no reason given by Temple to show why later on there should not be an even more sublime expression of God in the world. Now this Episcopalian Doctor will say that God exists and that Christ is divine. But in so saying, he is far from proclaiming the Catholic doctrine.

86. The same is true of the Hindu writings. Expressions may be found which are singularly Catholic in tone, especially when translated by a sympathetic scholar familiar with the Christian tradition and nomenclature. But the fundamental basis of all the teaching of Hinduism is pantheism. Because Christ is not Hindu in origin it is altogether unlikely that He would be accepted into the Hindu pantheon but intrinsically there is no reason why he could not.

87. It may be objected that the acceptation of Christ would mean the destruction of the pantheon, as in the case of the Roman deities. But here again the peculiar disregard of Hinduism for logical consistency, as far as his religion is concerned, would overcome that difficulty because the nature of the gods, as distinguished from the Absolute, is not clearly defined among them.

88. The all-pervading Protean flexibility of Hinduism does not make a dogma of its pantheon. Sivaites are not Vishnuites but both are Hindus. Yet it will hold on most firmly to it. Because the religion is so closely identified with the everyday life of the people, the denial of Hinduism, particularly in these days, means the denial of one's own identity as expressed in daily living. Even the Muslim had to compromise with this unyielding but ever seemingly indifferent attitude of the Hindu. Two of India's greatest emperors, Asoka and Akbar, tried with almost Christian charity to convert the people to a new religion not much removed from the old but failed. Christianity, with God's special help, could accomplish a miracle of grace but a glance at the map of the diocese of India will show that up to now, Christianity has succeeded with the Hindu where other religions also made some headway, that is, in the south, the

region which even the invading Aryans did not entirely win over to their side.

89. Because of the entirely adogmatic character of Hinduism, conversions of individuals make less of an impression on neighbors than in other countries. At the same time, the good example of Christians is a less telling argument than elsewhere. The Hindu will be happy about it but it does not lead him to think of the sources of that goodness. The lack of a central religious authority among them also weakens whatever force there might be in the conversion of Brahmins. Indeed, the Brahmins, weak in themselves, do not form a strong unified group, but are broken up into sub-castes. What one Brahmin does is not necessarily the expression of all Brahmins, nor is it an indication of the truth or falsity of Brahmin teachings. Tertullian, the great lawyer of Christianity, arguing the truths of Christianity with invincible logic, would possibly have had many hearers because of his clipped Latin but no followers in India. His manner of argumentation is far removed from them.

90. The caste system with its laws concerning marriage and eating is a great obstacle to any rapid conversions. It cannot be ignored entirely, especially in social circles, but obviously it restricts the field for Catholic marriages and by its laws of eating puts great artificial burdens upon Catholics. As long as the caste system exercises great influence in the social life of India, conversions to the faith must of necessity be slow. It remains to be seen how the new government of the Dominion of India will act in sustaining or abolishing the system.

Study Outline

Gerald C. Treacy, S.J.

Part 1. Paragraphs 1-31

Hinduism is a traditional way of Indian life. Buddhism, Islamism and other forms of religion are not Hindu because they are not strictly traditional. The Hindu way of life is the way of ritual. By his way of life the Hindu atones for his shortcomings in his previous incarnation. When the course of all reincarnations has been finished he will find true life in God. His attitude toward life is fatalistic.

The Brahmins or priestly class have been the leading force in shaping the Indian way of life. The people lead their lives as they will but always within the limits of Brahmin tradition. A study of the land and the people will show that given even the germ of Hinduism, it would flourish in India.

Questions

Is India a country or a nationality?
When did Hinduism become the way of life for the Indian people?
Give a descriptive definition of Hinduism.
What are the Vedas and when were they written?
Is Hinduism a way of life in the same sense as Christianity?
What is the Indian's attitude toward the Absolute?
Explain the Indian's attitude toward the caste system.
What influence do the Brahmins wield over the people?
Has Christianity changed the temper of the Oriental?
Were the Hindus determined by their surroundings to develop Hinduism?

Part 2. Paragraphs 32-59

Hinduism goes back to the dawn of recorded history in India. It gradually grew and was docilely accepted by the Hindus. The primitive Indians followed animism as a form of worship. Idol worship existed in India before 1500 B.C. when the Vedas or sacred books of the Hindus were written.

There are four important periods in the history of Hinduism. They are the Vedantic, the Buddhist, the Moslem and the European. Hinduism changed during all these periods. The appearance of Buddhism in India is less striking than its disappearance. Buddhism however showed one great weakness in the Hindu system. It showed that there was no unifying element of visible character. Moslemism failed in India. The European influence on Hinduism has come from commercial and political sources rather than from religious ones. English influence contributed to the development of Indian nationality.

Questions

How old is Hinduism in India?
Name the four important periods in the history of Hinduism.
Are Buddhism and Hinduism alike?
Did Buddha change the internal development of Hinduism?
Did Buddhism survive in India?
How did the Moslem conquest affect Hinduism?
What is Moslemism's position today in India?
Did Moslemism persecute the Hindus?
What has been the European influence on Hinduism?
How did the British conquest affect Indian nationalism?

The Hindu religion is more a matter of traditional practice than of logical belief. Whatever doctrine Hinduism contains comes from the Brahmins and is perpetuated by them. The Brahmins make little of the deities. There is a wide difference between the learned Brahmin's doctrine and the average Hindu's belief and practice.

There is one common point of doctrine for all Hindus. That is the doctrine of *Karma,* which means that every man is destined to as many re-incarnations as are required to purify him until he is pure enough to be absorbed into the ONE. This doctrine is the key to the whole Hindu temper and religion.

The caste system in India is the vehicle through which religion penetrates daily life. By this system every act of the Hindu is determined and given a religious significance. The Brahmin or priestly caste is the key to the system. On the priestly caste rest the existence and meaning of all the other castes. There are four main castes which are divided almost to infinity. While there are evils in the system it must be remembered that it has made possible the highly developed civilization of India.

Questions

Is the Hindu religion a matter of logical belief?
What is the Brahmin's attitude toward the deities?
Why is the Hindu attitude toward the gods a contradictory one?
Explain the doctrine of *Karma.*
In what doctrine did Buddha break with Hinduism?
What is woman's position in Hinduism?
What is the vehicle of religion to the Hindu?
What is the keystone to the caste system?
How are the different castes preserved?
What has made the high civilization of India?

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